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Consumer Well-Being & Environmental Well-Being: A Surprising Compatibility

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Consumers and the environment seem to be on a collision course

- Consumerism
  - Preoccupation with getting and spending
  - Insatiable wants
  - Belief that economic and social prosperity depends on growth in consumer spending
- Consumer appetites are draining the planet
  - Degradation of natural resources, global warming, pollution, exploitation of cheap world-wide labor

Positive Psychology: the study of happiness, well-being and quality of life

What really brings happiness in the consumer domain of life?

- Is it more money to buy more possessions?
- Is it living in luxury?
- Is it being admired for one's worldly goods?
- Not.

Do we consume in ways that support basic psychological needs?

- Competence, autonomy, relationships (Ryan & Deci)
- Pleasure, engagement, meaning, relationships, autonomy (Seligman)
- Self-acceptance, personal growth, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, autonomy (Ryff)

How can money and possessions further these needs?

Qualities of Consumer Well-Being

1. Low materialism

- Materialism (Richins & Dawson)
  - Acquisition as a central life goal
  - Belief that possessions bring happiness
  - Belief that self-worth depends on material success
- Materialism undermines well-being
  - The have-want gap and the hedonic treadmill
  - The less materialistic are happier and more satisfied with life

Better for the environment? yes

2. Thrift

- Money conservation, thrift and frugality capture this dimension.
- Frugality means conserving resources as well as money.
- Frugal people are more satisfied with life, generally.
- Psychological principle: the bad outweighs the good. Therefore avoiding the negatives of debt and constraint diminishes unhappiness.

Better for the environment? yes

Happiness from doing vs. having

3. Changing activities vs. changing material circumstances brings more lasting happiness

Better for the environment? Probably

4. More happiness from spending on experiences than spending on material objects. Experiences:

- live on in memory
- are incomparable
- are often shared with others
- are more central to the self, part of our biography
- need not be resource intensive, can be free

Better for the environment? Maybe

Money and Happiness

5. Money not that important for happiness

- Except for the very poor
- Advantage of money levels off @ $75,000 (2010)

Better for the environment? Yes

6. Less income inequality (Gini coefficient)

- Happier society
- Less materialistic (more attainable standard of “success”)
- Work fewer hours

Better for the environment? Yes

Personality for Happiness

7. Be intrinsically motivated

- Cultivate one's talents more than money
- Cultivate relationships more than fame

Better for the environment? Most likely

8. Have an independent (vs interdependent) sense of self

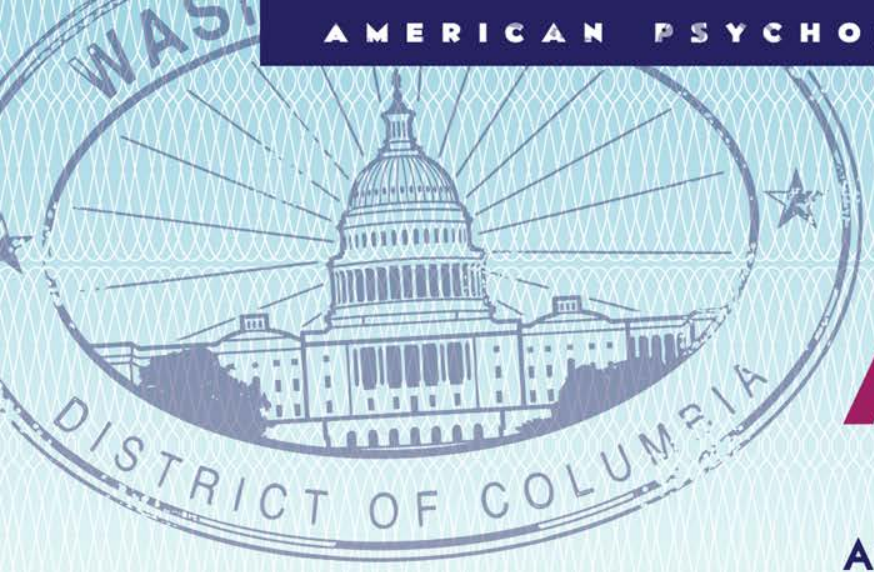
- Don't care that much what others think of your possessions.

Better for the environment? Probably

Less is more:

Consumer traits that promote well-being and that can be better for the environment.

- Don’t be materialistic
- Be thrifty
- Focus more on doing than having
  - Change activities rather than material circumstances
  - Spend on experiences over possessions
- Don’t care overly about money
- Live in a society with low income inequality
- Be intrinsically motivated
- Be independent



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